INTRODUCTION

1968 FROM REVOLT TO RESEARCH

Philipp Gassert and Martin Klimke

In May 1968, after the occupation of the main building at the Sorbonne had been ended by French police, the young Franco-German student leader, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, stood trial in a court in Paris. When the judge kept demanding his name, he finally identified himself as “Kuroń-Modzelewski,” using the names of two well-known Polish dissidents of the 1960s (who would later become the founding fathers of the 1980s Polish oppositional movement Solidarność).¹

By 1968, Jacek Kuroń’s and Karol Modzelewski’s 1964 “Open Letter to the Party,” in which they had criticized Poland’s stale postwar communism, was widely circulated among Western students. As the 1968 preface to the English edition suggested,

the worldwide wave of protests, rallies, marches, sit-ins, and battles with the police have brought consternation to the capitalist establishment of the West and the bureaucratic establishment of the deformed workers’ states of the East; they have brought hope and inspiration to truly revolutionary socialist forces everywhere.²

Even though Western European students knew little about the nature and causes of events in Eastern Europe (not to mention the so-called Third World), they readily imagined themselves as part of the same global fight against capitalist exploitation and communist repression, against colonial rule and imperialist domination. After all, 1968 saw the eruption of protests all over the globe, which stretched—it has become a cliché—from Berkeley to Berlin, from Bangkok to Buenos Aires, and from Cairo to Cape Town.³

While protests played out primarily on national stages, the rebellious young people of 1968 sincerely believed that they were involved in a struggle against established orders (and world orders) worldwide.⁴ The student (and sometimes worker) unrest in almost every country around the globe, along with major challenges to superpower hegemony, further reinforced their vision. These uprisings and challenges included Chairman Mao’s reigning in of the “Cultural Revolution”
turned terrorist nightmare in China, the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive, and the Prague Spring.5

During the late 1960s, political unrest, thus, was by no means limited to the advanced capitalist societies of the West. It had an immediate impact on the political culture of the socialist Eastern countries, as well. Furthermore, there were long-term repercussions in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. With respect to Eastern Europe, only Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia saw major disruptions. Yet East Germany, Hungary, Russia, the Ukraine, and others were indirectly affected by the Prague Spring. After the tanks had quashed hopes of reform in Prague, dissident movements received a new start.6

In the Middle East, the Six-Day War of 1967, as an event, greatly overshadowed the less dramatic social transformation of societies. Yet here, too, some of the essential 60s reforms, such as experimenting with new forms of cultural, intellectual, and political expression, took place. In Syria, students took the streets raising questions about sexuality. In the Palestinian Territories, paternal authority was in decline. In Israel, one year after the military triumph of 1967, no one staged protest demonstrations, yet beneath the surface, the seeds of an intellectual, anti-militarist, and pacifist critique had been sown.7

As the individual chapters in this book demonstrate, protesters and activists were aware of what was going on across borders and across oceans. They were inspired by “Tet” and the “French May.” They were outraged by the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke in Berlin and the Soviet invasion. While the motives for protests varied from country to country, people readily imagined themselves as part of a global community of protest.

This global nexus of protesters in various countries did not escape the attention of established political forces across the globe. In West Germany, Federal Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger summarily labeled student unrest an American revolutionary export.8 On the American side, the executive secretary of the US State Department’s Inter-Agency Youth Committee, Robert Cross, described the youth of the 1960s as the “first truly international generation.” For Cross, this was not the result of well-established, organizational infrastructure but from “a great cross-fertilization, a very rapid and effective student grape-vine” that developed when students with similar political and philosophical problems looked to peers in other countries to solve them. As Cross summed it up, “What happens in New York is known overnight in
Paris and Manila. The speeches of Rudi Dutschke are in the hands of Mark Rudd faster than you can seem to get your mail delivered.  

The globalism of 1968 captured more than just contemporary imaginations. Forty years on, “1968”—the preferred shorthand for the social and cultural transformations of the “Sixties” in most of continental Europe—has become a powerful myth. “1968” lingers on in memory all over Europe, in Asia, and in the Americas. In the culture wars of our time, it has grown so powerful that politicians like French President Nicolas Sarkozy or his Mexican counterpart Felipe Calderón have used it to stake out political territory. Forty years later, this imagined “global ’68” still stirs up raw and powerful emotions.

Such intense retrospective interest calls for an explanation. While, by now, most scholars in Europe and North America acknowledge that “1968”—the actual events as well as the imagined connection—had a global quality (which was not a common view only ten to fifteen years ago), few have attempted to present the events of that “crucial decade” in a country-by-country survey. Barely more attention has been given to answering the riddle of why “1968” still strikes a chord in people’s imaginations.

This book hopes to fill this gap by presenting voices on “1968” from more than three dozen countries. It grew out of a digital project by the Goethe-Institut in 2008 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary (broadly conceived) of the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s and out of a series of events held at the Goethe-Institut and the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC. The perspectives represented here are necessarily subjective and occasionally contradictory and provocative, yet both their analytical and at times emotional elements aptly illustrate the plethora of approaches to “1968” in today’s memorial culture. Although this volume cannot do justice to the complexity of the questions involved, we hope that the following contributions from a variety of intellectuals, historians, artists, and activists can provide impulses for further discussion and research on the imagined global revolution around 1968. To this end, we asked contributors to reflect personally on the events and their legacies in their respective countries, as well as to provide a short survey of those events.

**The making of 1968 as memory and history**

Why is it that “1968” is still so viciously contested in contemporary memory? And how does historiography come into the picture? In
his masterful survey of the 1960s, Gerry DeGroot observed, “After the decade died, it rose again as religion.”12 This is true. In 2007, the “1968” memory train went into overdrive. The number of conferences, books, and lecture series devoted to “1968” has been without parallel. One historian even spoke of a “publicistic orgy” that has swept Europe.13 All over the continent, the memory of “1968” has gone far beyond the level of personal anecdote and public acknowledgment, coming to signify something larger.

While this critical mid-century decade “refuses to go away” and while stories of “1968” still allow contemporary actors to stake out political claims, the 1960s are ever more an object of historical inquiry. By this we mean that “1968” is now being studied with the methods of the historical sciences. Historians, many born long after the 1960s, or, in any case, too young to remember this “crucial decade,” have started to dig into the archives. They increasingly analyze the events of the late 1960s within the decade’s long-term contexts, such as the breakthrough to consumer society,14 the struggles for Third World liberation,15 the temporary ebbing of the Cold War,16 and the emergence of new cultural and political formations in Western countries that have been labeled “postmodernity” or “postindustrial society.”17

At first glance, this simultaneous politicization and historicization of “1968” may strike observers as a paradox: Does writing the 1960s into history not mean that they lose their contemporary usefulness?18 This perspective, however, overlooks historiography’s perpetual (and not disinterested) role in the process of translating events into bits and pieces of cultural memory. As Jan Assmann and others have argued, memories of specific historical events often gain in their potential to generate controversy before being absorbed into a new consensus.19 Historical master narratives are generated by preceding controversy. “Historicization” and “mythologization” are not necessarily opposed to each other. Rather, they may be two sides of the same coin.20

A survey of the current literature thus may help us to understand why memories of “1968” linger and how they are constructed. By providing a brief overview of current research that focuses primarily on the transatlantic dimension, we also hope to demonstrate to non-specialist audiences how history as a discipline helps to shape cultural memory. Although historians face stiff competition from other, often more visible sources of influence (such as media outlets, politicians, and contemporary eyewitnesses), their contribution is critical.
At the current crossroads in 1960s scholarship, we see five broad avenues professional historians have taken since “historicization” started in earnest about ten years ago.21

First: Social context. There is an emerging consensus that the movements of the 1960s need to be studied as part and parcel of the great postwar transformations. The precise relationship between protest activities—especially during the late 1960s, when youth unrest exploded all across the globe—and the profound social and cultural transformations that started as far back as in the late 1940s and 1950s, is still hotly debated, however.

Second: Global revolt. Starting in the second half of the 1990s, research has paid increasing attention to the transnational/global/inter-national networks of “1968.” Although contemporaries often took the interconnectedness of events for granted, few empirical studies have looked at specific processes of transnational cooperation and identification.

Third: Regional response. While the globalism of ’68 has been en vogue in recent scholarship, more and more local studies have been published, too. Regional approaches are a sensible tool for understanding how ’60s protests impacted the social and cultural fabric of societies. They give us insight into how the general trends of the 1960s were created or negotiated at the grass-roots level. They also help to integrate different viewpoints into a history of the 1960s.

Fourth: The establishment. Historians increasingly acknowledge that the interaction of established, i.e., institutionally entrenched, actors and “anti-establishment” forces shaped the events of the ’60s protest movements. Both American and European historians frequently discuss the extent to which the dynamics between the two sides affected outcomes.

Fifth: The cultural turn. By now, cultural history has entered the historiographical mainstream. This means that the historical study of the ’60s, as in other areas of historical investigation, abounds with works on cultural artifacts such as symbolic forms, rituals, performative staging, and the representations of protest in the media or in a variety of other locations. This research also pays greater attention to how “1968” is retrospectively constructed.

In the following survey, we will first look at each of these five major areas of investigation and then conclude with a few thoughts on why
“1968” has acquired such an important role in Western and global memory.

1968 in social context

A large number of historians decry the sensationalist treatment of the dramatic events of “1968” in public and its use for contemporary political positioning, arguing instead that the events desperately need to be understood within their long-term contexts. On the events in Germany, for example, Axel Schildt emphasizes that “1968” came on the heels of a dynamic modernization of German society that had been well under way since the late 1950s. The New Left’s rise to a mass phenomenon was more a symptom than a cause of change.

In the American scholarly literature, this long-term perspective has been established for some time. It helps that the label “1968” is not very common in the English language. When used, it refers rather to the actual events of that year, in “which the dream died” (as the journalist Jules Witcover once put it). In the American case, 1968 recalls the murders of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., the violent explosions in inner-city ghettos, and the confrontations during the “siege of Chicago.” It is less about “Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll.” Debates about the 1960s rather than 1968 in America automatically evoke long-term views.

Thus, what matters is not so much the overused label “1968,” but the social transformations associated with the long 1960s that “1968” often stands for in continental Europe. Because “1968” evokes specific events, the history of the 1960s has often been turned into an abbreviated one that regards protest as a catalyst rather than a symptom of change. With regard to Eastern Europe, this narrow view of “1968” does not make much sense because there was not much protest activity outside Poland, the ČSR, and (non-aligned) Yugoslavia in this particular year. Therefore, scholars of Warsaw Pact countries see “1968” more in the context of the long-term undermining of Soviet rule leading up to the events of the late 1980s.

In Britain, Arthur Marwick’s Sixties brought the history of “everyday” experiences back into the study of this era. Calling the postwar transformations a “cultural revolution,” by which he meant a change in the habits and lifestyles of millions of people (and not just a small cultural and intellectual avant-garde), Marwick portrayed the emerging counterculture as being enabled by larger societal transformations.
rather than being the catalyst of change. More recently, Gerry DeGroot also made a conscious effort to ground the 1960s more thoroughly in the postwar period. His “kaleidoscopic history” of the decade starts with the end of World War II and broadens the subject by including both liberal and conservative actors, including Tom Hayden and the (conservative) Young Americans for Freedom, Robert F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, and the Rolling Stones as well as the Monkees.

In Germany, numerous monographs with long-term approaches have been published in the last ten years. Detlef Siegfried’s study of the youth culture of the “long 1960s,” Christina von Hodenberg’s work on the emergence of the “critical paradigm” in journalism, recent collections on the West German churches and on how Germans “dealt with the Nazi Past” all analyze the late 1960s as a time when long-term trends coalesced into a short-lived upsurge in protests.

**Global 1968**

A second area that has seen spectacular growth in scholarship is “Global 1968,” a perspective that focuses on the emerging networks of protest worldwide, as well as the real and imagined cooperation among anti-establishment forces across national borders. A steady stream of publications has flowed on this theme since the 1990s. Yet few monographs have been devoted to the specifics of interaction. Nowadays, the conventional wisdom seems to be that “in the beginning there was America.” Even surveys that focus on Germany—like those of Norbert Frei and Wolfgang Kraushaar—open with descriptions of the rise and fall of the Californian-American counterculture. They tell a story of humble beginnings among Beat Poets, the germinating Civil Rights Movement, the rise of the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, the Haight-Ashbury “Summer of Love,” and so on. After pausing at the great summit of Woodstock, such accounts then continue with the dystopian aspects of the protest culture, with the Manson murders and the nightmare of Altamont. This often serves as a boiler plate for developments elsewhere; for example, in Germany, where “1968” has been described as a descent from the February 1968 Vietnam Congress into RAF terrorism.

Never has there been so much historical expertise on the various “1968s.” Apart from the essays published in this volume, there are now studies available in English and German on many countries, including but not limited to Denmark, France, the Netherlands,
Northern Ireland, Sweden, Yugoslavia, etc. The “French May” has been covered in hundreds of books, articles, and monographs. The long Italian “hot summer” has received an equal amount of attention. Several collected volumes present varied and often problem-oriented approaches on various aspects of 1968, and many of them offer cross-cultural comparisons. With these individual country studies, we are now in a much better position to understand what the specifics of each “1968” were and how they resembled each other.

Comparison needs to be informed by an understanding of interactions and mutual observation. For some time, social movement research has been interested in the question of the extent to which the success of individual movements hinges on transnational connections. Diachronic comparison with earlier European revolutions suggests that movements in one national context can be jump-started by events across the border (as was the case with the French February revolution of 1848).

Also, certain nonconformist networks like the Situationist International, first founded in France, with allies in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, have been the focus of research for a while now. Similar to the American Beat poets, these networks helped to pave the way for the larger New Left revolt in the late 1960s. That the New Left in itself was an international phenomenon is almost a truism. Its networks were often grounded in the old Left, which had a transnational character, too. Moreover, after the Hungarian crackdown in 1956, “consensus liberals” in various European and North American countries shared a disenchantment with Soviet communism.

For the German-American case, the basic research has been done. It demonstrates how important these interactions were for the development of movement tactics. Similar studies are emerging in the Eastern European and Latin American context. Historians are looking at the global interconnectedness of the Prague Spring. Others explore the role that revolutionary imports played in South America and how these ideas were then reimported into the European context. Although histories of the “Paris May” and “Prague 1968” are abundant, both places could serve as a global history case study. Historians could use Paris and Prague not only to understand how representations of events in one place influence actors abroad, but also which specific interactional mechanisms were at play. This would help to explain
why certain events have gained canonic status in memories of 1968, whereas others have been forgotten.

**Local 1968**

While research on “1968” has gone global, increasing attention has been devoted to how protests played out in local contexts. This is particularly true for research on the United States and West Germany, but also for other European countries. Up to the 1990s, movement historians focused on the “epicenters of protest” such as the US West Coast, New York, Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, Tokyo, or Mexico City. Such a centralist perspective may have made sense for launching research in this field because it was these central locations where events started or where they gained the attention of wider audiences. Yet local studies now provide a necessary complement to this view, revealing a much more nuanced and multi-faceted story.

Local studies are one good way to get a grasp of the social and cultural impact of protest movements. Movements faced similar challenges in different local areas. But they also had to deal with specific circumstances. While movements were often focused on global issues—such as the war in Vietnam or the postcolonial struggles in Africa and Latin America—the long-term consequences can best be understood if we look at specific communities. One study focusing on Philadelphia, for example, shows how the emerging New Left had to negotiate older traditions, the specific Quaker heritage of this city, as well as the often conflicting agendas of mostly white students and the sizeable civil rights movement there. This multi-perspectivity has certainly complicated the picture.

Thus, it is at the local level that movement and establishment perspectives can most easily be examined together. A recent study on the German university town of Heidelberg, for example, looks at how the local student movement emerged slowly, months after events in Berlin had already reached their climax. Nevertheless, once the movement did emerge, the US military presence and the local government’s willingness to take a stand against the students contributed to events stretching out for years. This case suggests that different chronologies are required for various locations. In other countries, too, research with a local focus has often been centered on particular universities.

As we can see, such local studies contribute to a more varied image of the ’60s. In United States scholarship, historians have always looked...
beyond the campus revolt. As one monograph on Lawrence, Kansas, shows, the metaphorical “Sixties” were populated not only by the usual suspects, such as campus radicals, demonstrators against the war in Vietnam, intellectual dissenters, members of the civil rights movement, feminists, and radical groups like the Black Panthers and the Weathermen, but that conservatives also got into the game. Not unsuccessful in fending off quite a few challenges, conservatives also managed to change the rules.

That the “personal is political,” for example, was once a Leftist sentence of faith. Yet conservatives were not afraid to follow the example of an originally Leftist counterculture. They also inaugurated processes of what the historian Rusty Monhollon has called the personalization of politics. While some made the political personal through their participations in the protest movements, others reacted with opposing political agendas driven by similar forms of protest. This all played itself out on the local level, where many critical decisions were made. In the end these small local changes added up to an overall transformation of culture and society.\textsuperscript{49}

**Bringing the establishment back in**

From local studies, the crucial importance of the “other” side is quite evident. In addition to placing “1968” more firmly in the long postwar period and its transnational context, therefore, historians have increasingly begun to look at how protest was shaped by the interaction between movements and established actors.\textsuperscript{50} In political science, students of social movements now see activists’ ability to draw support from establishment actors as the single most crucial element for their success.\textsuperscript{51} For example, as we know from South America, liberation theology, which became a powerful source of inspiration for activists during the 1970s and 1980s, had a firm grounding in the Catholic establishment of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{52}

In fact, one less developed area of research seems to be the relationship between the churches and protest movements. In Germany, discussion has often centered on the question of whether its protests were culturally grounded in a Protestant milieu.\textsuperscript{53} In Italy and Belgium, the Catholic Church played an active role as a target, stage, or commentator of protest.\textsuperscript{54} In the United States, the link between protest movements and non-conformist religious groups such as the Quakers has a long tradition.\textsuperscript{55} Obviously, the civil rights movement came out of established black churches.
In most of Europe, the labor movement, represented by the labor unions, was another established force that should not be overlooked. Unions and workers were a contributing and sometimes driving factor in the events that were unfolding during the late 1960s. The German demonstrations against the so-called emergency laws were pushed by well-established labor unions such as IG Metall.

The relationship between activists and established political figures, likewise, is increasingly scrutinized. From research on West Germany’s student movement, we now know that many politicians were sympathetic to it, even though they quite adamantly criticized violent excesses. Götz Aly, although sensationalizing (and superficial) in drawing parallels between the student movement of the late ’60s and the National Socialist seizure of power in 1933, provided some remarkable insight into the discussions within the chancellor’s office in Bonn. Chancellor Kiesinger and some of his advisers perceived the students as helpful in broadening democratic attitudes in Germany. Martin Klimke’s research on discussions within the White House demonstrates that agencies such as the CIA were quite perceptive in their analysis of worldwide student unrest.

Anyone who wishes to understand the long-term consequences of the ’60s would be well advised to look at how the cultural revolutions of the 1960s were absorbed by established actors, within institutions like political parties and especially universities. The impact on academia became a very contentious issue during the 1980s in the US, when the ’60s counterculture was blamed for a “closing of the American mind.” The argument could be made, however, that new academic paradigms and fads coming out of the 1960s, such as ethnic and women’s studies, post-colonialism, and the much broader cultural studies, have further strengthened the cultural influence of the United States abroad. For most European countries, though, we know very little about how the reform impulses worked themselves out within the university system.

A particularly interesting point is how the originally New Leftist impulses of “1968” were picked up by activists on the other side of the political spectrum. In the US, grass-roots organizations that resisted liberal reforms, such as busing or the Equal Rights Amendment, successfully acquired tactics from the ’60s movement. Similarly, the youth organization of the (conservative) Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Germany hoped to learn from the New Left. Furthermore, conservative evangelical Christians were quite willing to adopt countercultural methods.
With more and more studies now devoted to understanding how established actors reacted to the unrest in the streets, we move beyond simple oppositions. In many cases, reform-oriented politicians of a liberal or conservative persuasion perceived the student movement as helpful to their efforts to reform universities. Of course, one could ask whether the break-up of the grand alliance of conservative and liberal reformers, which occurred in the late 1960s, is one little-noticed “cost” of 1968. On the other hand, it becomes clear by looking at both sides, established forces as well as protest movements, that historians should avoid replicating contemporary divisions of “us vs. them.” Rather, we should move beyond such clichés by looking at how both sides interacted with and perceived each other.

1968 as cultural history

The recent fortieth anniversary of “1968” was the first one since cultural history approaches have become mainstream in the last two decades. While the “cultural turn,” which started in France in the 1970s, has been underway for a while, it took some time before its impact began to be felt among contemporary historians. However, “1968” research is one point of entry for this “constructivist” paradigm into the once heavily guarded traditionalist quarters of contemporary history.

One promising new area of research is media and communications of the protest movements. Obviously, protest hinges on specific forms of expression. This new research paradigm—most prominently advanced by Joachim Scharloth—focuses on the ways protest has been generated, historically, by means of specific communication strategies. Scholars in this paradigm now ask how social order and “identities” are shaped by public and highly visible actions, such as street marches, demonstrations, happenings, street theater, mock tribunals, or panels. It seems that activists consciously try to challenge, subvert, and redefine established social rituals, as the opening example of this essay demonstrated, when Daniel Cohn-Bendit refused to play according to the rules in a court of law.

The new cultural history of 1968 is not the domain of historians alone. To a large extent, it has become an interdisciplinary endeavor, as the contributions to some of the more recent collections demonstrate. Furthermore, media scholars like Kathrin Fahlenbrach and Dorothee Liehr underscore the fact that the movements of 1968 gained their public notoriety in part because the 1960s marked a period in which
the media stood at a critical juncture.\textsuperscript{67} This is especially true for continental Europe, where the media became more visual during the 1960s. In the US, however, these developments had set in half a decade earlier, whereas many societies outside the old “Western core” communicated mostly via radio and print.\textsuperscript{68}

Research on the cultural history of “1968” in the narrower sense of the term has also exploded. In the West German case, we now have studies on hitherto virtually unknown areas such as graffiti,\textsuperscript{69} counter-publics,\textsuperscript{70} street theater,\textsuperscript{71} performativity,\textsuperscript{72} body and sexual politics,\textsuperscript{73} emotions and lifestyle,\textsuperscript{74} the anti-ritual performances in court cases,\textsuperscript{75} and literary and musical avant-gardes.\textsuperscript{76} Scholars also address how performances of a critical nature later slipped into terrorism and murder.\textsuperscript{77} Music, especially, has become a major area of research currently teeming with activities.\textsuperscript{78}

These new cultural studies approaches to the ‘60s, with their attention to the sources and detail and with their pronounced unwillingness to enter into debates about who lost or won, seem to be returning some of the original flavor of the era to the collective memories of the events. While most of the debates of the 1980s and 1990s centered on questions of the impact of “1968,” or the dichotomy of its success or failure, it now seems to be less necessary to frame the issues in such a fashion.

This brings us to our last and concluding question, which cannot be answered here in a satisfying manner, because the issues involved still demand years of research: How is “1968” being remembered—and what has been forgotten during the past forty years? Historians now hotly debate this issue.\textsuperscript{79}

With respect to France, Kristin Ross has described “May’s Afterlife” as one of an emerging consensus of “1968” as a cultural revolution that was undone in the 1980s and 1990s.\textsuperscript{80} Nonetheless, every strike or large-scale protest in France thereafter has instantly been measured against 1968. However, Eddy Fougier, writing on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary, observed that the usefulness of 1968 as a stand-in for contemporary conflicts has been played out. Quoting Marc-Olivier Padis, he asserts that “It has become impossible to play an imaginary civil war with respect to May 1968. May 1968 has become a part of history.”\textsuperscript{81}

For Germany, Albrecht von Lucke recently traced how “1968,” starting in the late 1970s, was increasingly seen as the project of a generation.
This happened in part during the “lead years,” when the former protagonists of the West German student movement wanted to distance themselves from RAF terrorism, on the one hand, and show what the original liberating impulses of “1968” had been, on the other. Not unlike neighboring France, Germany’s consensus on 1968 was greatest during the late 1980s, when, on the twentieth anniversary, “everybody seemed to love 1968.” While it remains unpublished, Elizabeth Peifer’s dissertation, “1968 in German Political Culture, 1967-1993: From Experience to Myth,” offers further insight into this process of “working through 1968” up to the early 1990s.

As the proliferation of photo books on “1968” shows, the memories of “1968” are often transmitted by visual icons—which lend themselves to crass commercialization. In this respect, the historicization of the “visual 1968” has barely begun. Many recent photo books repeat the stereotypical visual confrontations of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They barely ask how these images were constructed and how they became “key texts” of 1968. Furthermore, these illustrated volumes often center on one country, with “global” 1968 receiving only a token presence. In part, these difficulties come with the genre, because copyright issues limit images’ use even more than written text.

It remains to be seen whether “1968,” despite national idiosyncrasies, can serve as a reference point in transnational memory. In a unified Europe, where an active search for common symbols is underway, “1968” could be one historical marker that Europeans from both East and West could relate to, if they so desired. Establishing a line, albeit tentative, to the pivotal year 1989, Europeans could frame “1968” as an event in which struggles for freedom brought people to the streets in Eastern and Western countries—as an event thus symbolizing European unity. But will they so desire? And will “global 1968” be able to play a similar role worldwide? We cannot yet tell whether people in Mexico, Japan, Egypt, and Europe are prepared to envision “1968,” broadly conceived, as part of one global, historical whole. It seems many historians themselves may not (yet) be prepared to make this case.

In his address at the University of Cape Town in South Africa on June 6, 1966, Robert F. Kennedy painted a grim picture of the state of the world: “There is discrimination in New York, the racial inequality of apartheid in South Africa, and serfdom in the mountains of Peru. People starve to death in the streets of India; a former Prime Minister is summarily executed in the Congo; intellectuals go to jail in Russia; and thousands are slaughtered in Indonesia; wealth is lavished on
armaments everywhere in the world.” Yet, he argued, “as I talk to young people around the world I am impressed not by the diversity but by the closeness of their goals, their desires, and their concerns and their hope for the future.”

For Kennedy, the young generation across the globe represented “the only true international community” that was able to transcend “obsolete dogmas and outworn slogans” and “a present that is already dying.” In his view, “this world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease.” Hence, amidst revolutionary transformations worldwide, Kennedy called on the young to take the lead, admitting that “you, and your young compatriots everywhere have had thrust upon you a greater burden of responsibility than any generation that has ever lived.”\(^5\) If and how the young generation rose to this challenge and what the legacies of this turbulent time were will no doubt continue to occupy the minds of historians for some time to come.

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ENDNOTES


4 Ronald Fraser, 1968: A Student Generation in Revolt (New York, 1988); Martin Klimke, The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties (Princeton, 2009).

5 Suri, Power and Protest; Fink et al., eds., 1968: The World Transformed.

See the contributions on Hungary and East Germany in this volume. On the latter, see also Timothy S. Brown, “1968 East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History,” American Historical Review 114 (Feb. 2009): 69–96.

6 See the contribution on Israel in this volume.


8 President of the SDS chapter at Columbia University, Mark Rudd gained national notoriety as a leader and spokesperson during the student strike and occupation of campus buildings in April 1968. See Klimke, The Other Alliance, 236.

9 Kastner and Mayer, eds., Weltwende, 9.

10 The digital project by the Goethe-Institut can be found at http://www.goethe.de/1968. The series “Revolution is in the Streets: The Sixties from an International Perspective,” including film screenings, lectures, and a panel discussion, took place May 5-21, 2008. This volume also stands in the context of a workshop, “1968: 40 Years Later,” which occurred at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, on April 12, 2008, and an international conference, “1968 in Japan, Germany, and the USA: Political Protest and Cultural Change,” which was held at the Japanese-German Center in Berlin on March 4-6, 2009, and was co-sponsored by the GHI.


13 Axel Schidt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., Between Marx and Coca-Cola (New York, 2006); Detlef Siegfried, Time Is on My Side. Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre (Göttingen, 2006).


16 This is the point most commonly made, for example, in David Farber, ed., The Sixties: From Memory to History (Chapel Hill, 1994); Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, ed., 1968: Vom Ereignis zum Gegenstand der Geschichtswissenschaft (Göttingen, 1998); Franz-Werner Kersing, “Entzauberung des Mythos? Ausgangsbedingungen und Tendenzen einer
The German Historikerstreit is a prime example of such a process. 

Jan Assmann, Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen (Munich, 1992), 76.

See the preface in Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried, Karl Christian Lammers, eds., Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in beiden deutschen Gesellschaften (Hamburg, 2000).

Coming from a different interpretative angle, Ulrich Herbert also characterizes “1968” as an excessive revolt in an increasingly liberal social environment; see Ulrich Herbert, ed. Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945-1980 (Göttingen, 2002).


Detlef Siegfried, Time Is on My Side.


Bernd Hey and Volkmar Wittmüzt, 1968 und die Kirchen (Bielefeld, 2008).


Ibid., and Wolfgang Krauschaar, Achtundsechzig. Eine Bilanz (Berlin, 2008).

On the complicated relationship between the student movement and 1970s terrorism, which cannot be covered here, see the various contributions in Wolfgang Krauschaar, ed., Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus, 2 vols. (Hamburg, 2006).


Klimke and Scharloth, 83-96; and Stuart Hilwig, *Italy and 1968: Youthful Unrest and Democratic Culture* (Basingstoke, 2009).

37 See Horn, *The Spirit of '68*.


48 Mary Ann Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland: The Sixties at Indiana University* (Bloomington, 2002).

49 Rusty L. Monhollon, *This is America?: The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York, 2002), 6.

50 For an earlier appeal “to bring the establishment in,” see Philipp Gassert and Pavel A. Richter, eds., *1968 in West Germany: A Guide to Sources and Literature of the*

51 Roger Karapin, Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and the Right Since the 1960s (University Park, 2007).


60 Klime, Other Alliance, 195-235.


71 Dorothea Kraus, Theater-Proteste: zur Politisierung von Strasse und Bühne in den 1960er Jahren (Frankfurt, 2007).


75 Joachim Scharloth, “Ritualkritik,” 78-82.


77 Thomas Hecken, Avantgarde und Terrorismus: Rhetorik der Intensität und Programme der Revolte von den Futuristen bis zur RAF (Bielefeld, 2006); Sara Hakemi, “Terrorismus und Avantgarde,” in Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus, ed. Kraushaar, 1604-19.


80 Kristin Ross, May ’68 and Its Afterlives (Chicago, 2002).

81 Fougier, “Mai 68 in Frankreich,” 79.

82 Albrecht von Lucke, 68 oder neues Biedermeier: Der Kampf um die Deutungsmacht (Berlin, 2008).


84 For countless examples of this, see, for example, the blog of the exhibition “’So geht Revolution’ – Werbung und Revolte,” at http://home.bawue.de/~mauss/revo.html.

85 Robert F. Kennedy, “Day of Affirmation Address (as delivered),” University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa, June 6, 1966, in John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, Boston, MA.